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Agenda item 3 (a)

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEME: COORDINATED FOLLOW-UP BY THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ORGANIZED BY THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Possible common themes for follow-up of major international conferences at the coordination segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 1996

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its Agreed Conclusions 1995/1 (see A/50/3, chap. III, sect. A), the Economic and Social Council invited the Secretary-General, taking into account the suggestions made in paragraph 57 of his report (E/1995/86) and based on the work of relevant subsidiary bodies and through consultations with Member States, relevant organs of the United Nations system and specialized agencies, to offer suggestions for possible common themes for follow-up of major international conferences for consideration and decision by the Council concerning its coordination segment.

I. PROPOSALS BY MEMBER STATES

2. The Secretary-General carried out informal consultations with Member States on 22 and 28 November 1995, as a result of which he received written proposals from Spain, on behalf of the European Union, and Canada.

3. The European Union proposed as a theme "Coordination of the United Nations system activities for poverty eradication", which should focus on three aspects: (a) coordination of United Nations support for national poverty eradication plans, including the provision of basic social services, particularly at the

field level; (b) coordination of United Nations efforts to ensure that its development programmes for poverty eradication take fully into account the gender perspective; and (c) ways of monitoring United Nations performance in the field of poverty eradication, in particular through the harmonization of multi-year programmes of work of the functional commissions, within the framework of the coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields.

4. Canada, besides proposing a sectoral theme based on poverty eradication, submitted a topic in follow-up to the thirteenth paragraph of the Agreed Conclusions. Accordingly, the Economic and Social Council would determine how it intends to ensure the harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of functional commissions and might wish to conduct an initial review of multi-year thematic work programmes to identify areas where harmonization may be particularly required, bearing in mind the need for a clearer division of labour among the work of the commissions.

II. PROPOSAL BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

5. The Secretary-General also consulted with relevant bodies of the United Nations system and the specialized agencies through the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) at its seventh session. Taking into account the views expressed by Member States and by CCPOQ as well as the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the work of the Executive Board of UNICEF, the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Commission on Human Rights, the Population and Development Commission, the Commission on Social Development, and the Commission on the Status of Women, it is suggested that "gender equality, equity and empowerment of women" could be selected as the common theme for the 1996 coordination segment of the Council. This theme figures prominently in almost all the conferences. It is also relevant to the work of almost all organizations of the system.

6. The wide-ranging set of measures of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (see A/CONF.177/20, chap. I, resolution 1) requires implementation through the work of all the bodies and organizations of the United Nations system, during the period 1995-2000. Implementation is to be specific, but also part of wider programming. As Governments have committed themselves to empowerment of women at previous global United Nations summits and conferences, coordination is recognized as all the more crucial for follow up of the World Conference. In paragraph 317 of the Platform for Action, the General Assembly and the Council are invited to review and strengthen the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account, inter alia, "the need for synergy with other related commissions and Conference follow-up, and for a system-wide approach to its implementation". The Council is also invited to ensure that its other functional commissions integrate a gender perspective into their work. The Secretary-General has indicated (see A/50/744) that he will propose to the Administrative Committee on Coordination the establishment of an inter-agency task force on the empowerment and advancement of women, within the framework of efforts for a coordinated follow-up to international conferences.

7. The World Summit on Children (see A/45/625, annex) emphasized the critical roles of women in the well being of children and the need to ensure equal opportunities to the girl child. It called for specific action to enhance the status of women, including their health status, and ensure their equal access to productive resources and education. The Summit established targets for the reduction of maternal mortality and eradication of illiteracy with an emphasis on female literacy, which have been reaffirmed and built upon by subsequent international meetings and conferences. The Plan of Action also called for gender disaggregated statistics, so as to ensure an equitable impact of programmes on girls and women. In reviewing the strategy of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in basic education in 1995, the Executive Board called for placing a greater emphasis on targeting the inequality between girls and boys. In addition to the UNICEF Executive Board, other intergovernmental bodies are involved in the follow-up of the Summit's goals and targets.

8. In Agenda 21, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (see A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1/(vol. I), resolution I, annex I), chapter 24 concerns "Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development". This chapter is part of one of the five cross-sectoral clusters which the Commission on Sustainable Development adopted, at its first substantive session, for annual review in its multi-year thematic programme of work through 1997. At its third session, in 1995, the Commission, in view of the convening of the Fourth World Conference on Women, stressed the central role played by women in creating appropriate conditions for sustainable development and invited that Conference to fully include the need for sustainable development in its deliberations.

9. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (see A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III), adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, contains a number of references to the status of women. The chapter on "Equality, dignity and tolerance" has a specific section devoted to "The equal status and human rights of women". In paragraph 44 of this section it is urged that human rights of women should play an important role in the deliberations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Under its sub-item entitled "Alternative approaches and ways and means within the United Nations system for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms", the Commission on Human Rights has been addressing the issue of human rights of women for a number of years. Most recently, at its fifty-first session (see E/1995/23), the Commission adopted resolutions on "The elimination of violence against women" (resolution 1995/85) and on the "Question of integrating the human rights of women into the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations" (resolution 1995/86), both of which address, inter alia, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Commission on the Status of Women. In addition, the Commission also adopted resolutions on "Violence against women migrant workers" (resolution 1995/20) and on "Traffic in women and girls" (resolution 1995/25), both of which draw partly on the International Conference on Population and Development and address, inter alia, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Commission on the Status of Women.

10. Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women are important ends of the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development (see A/CONF.171/13, chap. I,

resolution 1). They are also recognized as essential conditions for achieving population and development objectives and the overall goal of sustainable development. Chapter IV of the Programme of Action contains a number of actions to empower women and to eliminate discrimination against the girl child and improve her welfare. The Programme of Action underscores the roles of men in promoting gender equality. A working group on women's empowerment was established by the task force on the implementation of the Programme of Action. Gender aspects are to receive special emphasis when, within the context of its multi-year programme of work, (see E/1995/27, annex I), the Commission on Population and Development reviews the theme of reproductive rights and reproductive health in 1996, the theme of international migration in 1997, and the theme of health and mortality in 1998. Relevant aspects will also be considered in the 1999 examination of population growth, structure and distribution. In reviewing the work programme for 1996-1997, the Commission on Population and Development noted that it was to take into account, inter alia, the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

11. Commitment 5 of the World Summit for Social Development (see A/CONF.166/9, chap. I, resolution 1) calls for equality and equity between men and women and for recognizing and enhancing the participation and leadership of women in all aspects of life and development. Specific measures for gender equality are contained throughout the Programme of Action. The work of the Commission on Social Development on the world social situation, on older persons, disabled persons and youth, or in the context of the international year of the family, is closely related to the status of women. For example, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (see A/50/728) has a section on girls and young women. The report of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development reviewed by the Commission in 1995 contained a section on integrating gender into development policies. At its special session to be held in 1996, the Commission on Social Development is to decide upon its multi-year thematic programme of work to the year 2000 for the review of the Summit

12. The Joint inspection Unit devoted a report to the fiftieth session of the General Assembly to "Advancement of women through and in the programmes of the United Nations system: what happens after the fourth World Conference on Women" (A/50/509). The General Assembly will examine some of its recommendations for making the system's gender programmes more effective in the future. Discussions of gender issues at the coordination segment of the Council might contribute to implementation of this objective.

13. As this brief review shows, apart from being addressed prominently in recent conferences, this issue is being addressed in a variety of ways and from different perspectives both at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels. It would therefore seem appropriate for the Council to consider how best to coordinate all these efforts to optimize results and minimize overlapping actions. It would also be timely for the Council to address this theme as part of the follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

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ELECTIONS, NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Election of 36 members of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme

Note by the Secretariat

1. By resolution 50/8 of 1 November 1995, the General Assembly decided, subject to the concurrence of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, that the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes should be reconstituted as the Executive Board of the World Food Programme.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly decided that the Executive Board would comprise 36 members elected from among the States Members of the United Nations or the States members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and also decided that the Economic and Social Council and the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations would elect 18 members each, as set forth in paragraph 2 of the resolution.

3. In paragraph 4 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Economic and Social Council, at its resumed substantive session of 1995, to elect 18 members of the Executive Board for a term beginning on 1 January 1996 in accordance with the following distribution and initial terms of office:

(a) Five members from the States included in list A, 1/ two for a term of three years, one for a term of two years and two for a term of one year;

(b) Four members from the States included in list B, 1/ one for a term of three years, two for a term of two years and one for a term of one year;

(c) Two members from the States included in list C, 1/ one for a term of three years and one for a term of one year;

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(d) Six members from the States included in list D, 1/ two for a term of three years, two for a term of two years and two for a term of one year;

(e) One member from the States included in list E, 1/ for a term of two years.

4. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Assembly decided that thereafter, all members of the Executive Board would be elected for a term of three years.

Notes

1/ Lists A to E are reproduced in document E/1995/L.11, annex II.

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ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Transformation of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes into the Executive Board of the World Food Programme

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Economic and Social Council the attached letter dated 18 December 1995 addressed to him from the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP). The Secretary-General has reviewed the letter and, as requested by the Executive Director, submits it to the Council for its consideration.

The attachments to the letter - the report of the Formal Working Group of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes on options for resource policies and long-term financing of WFP and the relevant sections of the report of the Committee on its fortieth session - will be submitted to the Council as an addendum to the present note.

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Annex

LETTER DATED 18 DECEMBER 1995 FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

At its fortieth session in November 1995, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) took decisions designed to place the resource base and long-term financing of the World Food Programme (WFP) on a more sound and predictable basis. Because these changes involve important policy dimensions, I am writing to ask that you submit the proposals concerning the new model to be applied on a trial basis to the Economic and Social Council for its consideration.

The World Food Programme has been doing a good job for many years. It has grown from a small experimental programme of $100 million over three years to an internationally recognized relief and development agency with a biennial turnover of about $3 billion. It now handles more than 3 million metric tonnes of food per year. Increasingly, however, WFP has been facing difficulty in securing the necessary mix of cash, commodities and services to enable it to continue to deliver high quality operations. This situation was exacerbated by the upsurge of complex emergency humanitarian operations that emerged in the late 1980s and sadly continues today. Some of the complicating elements include the practice of donors increasingly tying and designating their funding to particular operations or target populations, which has resulted in a loss of flexibility; the scope for, and willingness of, donors to support emergency operations with funding drawn from line items additional to those in their traditional development assistance budget, a practice that has often involved necessarily different accountability and reporting requirements; and the effort to use scarce resources in the most effective manner - for example, using food aid to save lives in emergency humanitarian situations but to do so in as developmentally relevant a way as possible.

Historically, WFP has depended on the development component of its activities for most of its cash resources. In the late 1980s more than two thirds of its resources supported food-assisted development projects. Emergency operations accounted for the rest. Today, this balance has been reversed, with more than two tonnes in three delivered supporting emergency humanitarian operations. This shift in the balance of activities seriously eroded the capacity of the development component to generate sufficient funds to meet the administrative costs of the Programme. There was increasing evidence that WFP had insufficient cash for it to strike a proper balance between the demands for high quality operations, in both its development and humanitarian assistance work, the requirement to consistently meet higher standards of accountability in a transparent way, and the programme support and administrative budget needed for the task.

This led to the search for new ways to finance the Programme. At its thirty-eighth session, in December 1994, CFA reaffirmed that WFP faced serious problems in the field of finances which demanded urgent attention. The WFP financial management systems required strengthening and improvement. Measures were also needed to ensure that WFP programme support and administrative costs

were covered on the basis of full cost recovery. The Committee also agreed that WFP should have a more sound and predictable resource base, while preserving and strengthening its multilateral character. Moreover, it agreed that WFP should, in principle, have the flexibility to allocate resources within the different categories of operations (development activities; feeding of longer-term refugees and displaced people; and emergency operations) according to assessed need. In addition, the Committee considered that the WFP resource base should be broadened by seeking additional donors and that the Programme needed to ensure that it retained the capacity to draw on different line items of donors' budgets. Maintaining the status quo was not considered an acceptable alternative to restructuring the Programme's financing and resourcing procedures for the long term.

Accordingly, CFA decided to establish a formal working group on options for WFP resource policies and long-term financing. Participation in the Working Group was open to all States members of the Programme and to the observer for the European Community. The Group was to present a progress report at the thirty-ninth session in May 1995 and a full report at the fortieth session of CFA. The Chairman of CFA was subsequently elected Chairman of the Working Group and there was wide and active participation in all of the meetings of the Group by both the members of CFA and observers. The relevant decisions taken by the Committee at its thirty-eighth session were included in its twentieth report to the Economic and Social Council and the FAO Council. The report was before the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 (see E/1995/96) and the FAO Council at its 108th session.

At the thirty-ninth session of CFA, it was agreed that new mechanisms were required in order to achieve a clearer relationship between funding windows and specific WFP activities, and that these mechanisms should achieve full cost recovery. At the fortieth session, the Working Group reported that it had reached agreement on changes for restructuring WFP resource policies and long-term financing. A summary of those recommendations is contained in paragraph 23 of the report of the Working Group.

The Working Group recommended, among other things, that CFA request the WFP secretariat to prepare any necessary changes in the WFP General and Financial Regulations and submit them, through its governing body, to the appropriate bodies for consideration and approval. In the interim, the Group recommended that the secretariat should be requested to implement the new model on a trial basis, commencing 1 January 1996 (see para. 23 (l) of the report of the Working Group). CFA endorsed those recommendations (see paras. 14-22 of the report of the Committee on its fortieth session).

The WFP secretariat is preparing a revised draft of the Financial Regulations, which it will present for the advice of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and of the FAO Finance Committee, and thereafter to the WFP Executive Board. The Advisory Committee and the FAO Finance Committee were informed, both in the documentation and during the proceedings, that the 1996-1997 programme support and administrative budget had been prepared in a way that could accommodate new financing procedures.

At its thirty-eighth session CFA instructed the secretariat that the strategic and financial plan and budget for 1996-1997, though prepared on the basis of the current procedures, should allow for changes in the longer-term arrangements for financing WFP. Expeditious action by the Economic and Social Council will allow the trial period effectively to coincide with the biennial budget period 1996-1997 and will facilitate the review of the working of the new model and its associated policies at the conclusion of the first biennium of operation.

The new model for placing the financing of WFP on a sound and predictable basis has been developed by the membership, working with the WFP secretariat, through an arrangement decided upon by the members of CFA. I would be grateful if you could arrange for this important new approach to the financing of WFP, a voluntarily funded programme, to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council for consideration. Until such time as the Economic and Social Council and the FAO Council review the proposals, the new resourcing mechanisms will not be formally implemented.

(Signed) Catherine BERTINI